

HOLLOW

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cross country skiing, Soldier Hollow benefits a well-balanced skier, one who can run the gamut of competition requirements ranging from aerobic training to technical skiing.

"It's a technical course — it follows the terrain," Aalberg said. "We haven't bulldozed out the course."

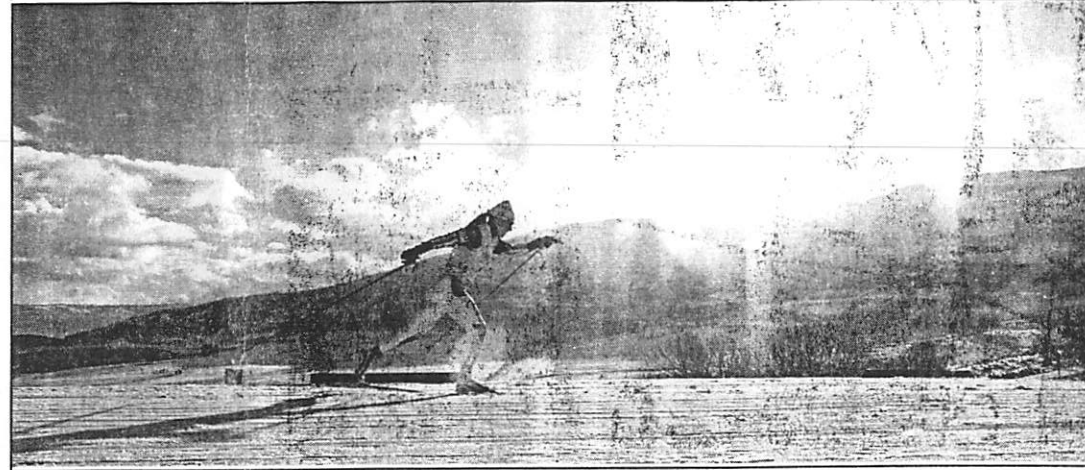
And it falls just under — by only a couple of meters — the maximum altitude allowed by FIS. The altitude allowances meant many other potential sites along the Wasatch Front — such as around Park City, where snows are much more abundant — were not feasible choices for development.

The still-up-there Soldier Hollow venue has many international skiers — particularly the Scandinavians — nervous about the Rocky Mountain highs for this week's World Cup and next year's Olympics. Remember, most of the Scandinavian countries — and much of Europe, for that matter — possess prominent stretches of seafrosts.

For example, the Norwegian national Nordic team — which often trains at or near sea level — can often be found training in "nitrogen houses," which help simulate high-altitude conditions.

Another of the most noticeable differences of the Soldier Hollow site from other cross country courses throughout the world is how visible nearly all the trails are to the spectator. At other competition sites and Olympic venues, cross country skiers can be seen at the start and at the finish, with only a momentary pass or two out from wooded areas during the event.

"You can stand here and see three-quarters of the race," said Aalberg, adding



U.S. skier Wendy Kay Wagner glides during the Ladies 5K Classic race during the FIS World Cup competition at Soldier Hollow Wednesday.

ing that "you can follow the last mile of the race — it's right in front of your eyes."

And the entire 1.5-kilometer course of the sprints — a new event added to the Olympic program for the 2002 Games — will be in full view of the spectators.

Ironically, one of Soldier Hollow's perceived disadvantages by local organizers ended up aiding the sight-line advantages of the venue. The deciduous trees, such as the aspen and scrub oak, make the Wasatch Mountain State Park area a visual showcase for three seasons — spring, summer and fall.

But organizers were disappointed the leafy limbs would be long gone come time for the Winter Olympics. However, the bare branches resulted in enhanced visibility for the spectators.

"It was a disadvantage that turned into an advantage," said Nelson. "It actually opens up the view."

While the venue and the view of compe-

tition will wow the hard-core Nordic aficionados and the millions of followers throughout Europe, SLOC sports directors know they've got a tough local audience in the United States — one that eschews Nordic sports for fast-paced winter alternatives such as alpine skiing and ice hockey.

"These sports are boring if you're an American and you go to watch them," admits Lyle Nelson, SLOC's director of the Soldier Hollow venue and a four-time Olympian in biathlon, which combined rifle shooting with cross country skiing.

With their different sports backgrounds and personalities, the guarded, private Aalberg and more public-minded, outgoing Lyle Nelson have joined forces to create a rare venue, since Soldier Hollow is the first major venue to host both Olympic cross country and biathlon. Much of the operations facilities and equipment as well as the main area of spectator seating

is located in between the key locations of the two sports.

Cross country has its longer network of courses as well as its start and finish areas to the west of the competition center and stands, while biathlon has its shooting range, penalty loop and system of shorter trails on the east.

While Aalberg is focused on developing a premier Nordic course and hosting the best-ever Olympic and World Cup cross country competitions, Lyle Nelson looks at Soldier Hollow and the events as to their long-term effect on the sports.

In other words, Aalberg's dream is the best venue and best Olympics; Lyle Nelson's is for long-lasting legacy in cross country and biathlon.

"We want to make Americans aware and to invigorate these sports," Nelson said. "If we don't we may have lost our best opportunity."

E-MAIL: taylor@desnews.com

WAX

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other two waxes under extreme conditions.

"Within the various categories, there is a huge number of different waxes, ranging from a minus 20 degrees to temperatures up to 50 degrees. It's a real art these days to wax skis," adds Stowe.

Proper waxing has, in fact, passed from casual application to a science. The problem, of course, is that once out on the track there is nothing a skier can do about a bad wax job.

For freestyle or skating skis, skiers use a textured wax that is rubbed on the bases and then buffed with a cloth.

For classic or gliding skis, wax is melted onto the bases with a hot iron and then smoothed over the bases. The excess wax is scraped off and then the ski is buffed with a stiff brush or piece of steel wool to work the wax into the bases.

The better the quality of the skis, the more receptive they are to wax.

The job of waxing was expanded a few years ago when skating or freestyle skiing was introduced. For years, the classical or gliding style was all that was allowed.

Now there are two distinct events, requiring two different types of skis, and each requiring a different waxing technique.

Classic skis are usually longer, between 190 and 210 centimeters. These skis, too, may have a patterned base that allows them to glide forward easily but resist sliding backward.

The freestyle skis are shorter. They start at around 160 centimeters for women and 180 for men.

A number of ski shops offer waxing classes during the winter. REI, says Stowe, will hold three or four free classes on waxing.

And, for anyone planning a winter outing on cross country skis, what they'll find is that a good wax can make touring a whole lot easier and more fun.

E-MAIL: grass@desnews.com

Cross country skiing glossary

What's in a name? If it's the name of a cross country event, you can get a good idea of the race's length, type and start, as well as the gender of the participants and the type of skiing technique they will use.

Take, for example, the men's 30-kilometer classical mass start. Most obviously, it's a 30-kilometer race for men. Skiers are limited to using the classical skiing technique. And since it's a mass start race, all skiers will begin at the same time at the starting line.

Techniques

● **Classical:** Also known as the diagonal stride, with the skier using a rearward kicking motion to move forward. Both skis stay in prepared tracks on the surface. On steep uphill segments of a course, a herring-bone step is allowed. Skiers use a kicking motion

● **Freestyle:** Various techniques are allowed, with skating being the most common. Skating is keeping one ski in the track but pushing off to the side with the edges of the other ski. While it proved to be faster than the classical technique, international purists claimed it wasn't "traditional" and it was banned for some time in World Cup and Olympic competition during the 1980s.

Event types

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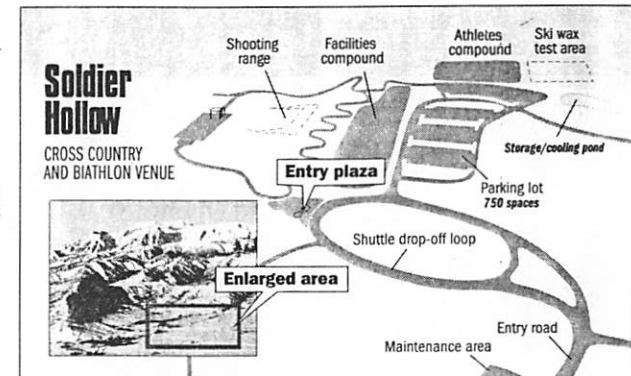
EVENTS

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Event types

● **Individual distances:** For a long time, cross country was simply a race against the clock, with individuals starting in intervals and ranked according to finish times.

● **Relay:** Nations compete against each other, with four team members each skiing identical distances — usually 5 kilometers for the women and 10 for the men. However, two of the team members are limited to the classical technique, while the other two may use a free technique.

● **Pursuit:** In the two-segment event, the skiers compete in a specified distance using an interval start. For the second leg in the pursuit event, the skiers begin in order of finish from the first race and are released at the start line according to intervals of their finish time. Looking to make up the time lost in the first leg, all participants “pursue” the leader in the event’s second segment, and the winner is the skier who crosses the finish line first.

● **Sprint:** In a knockout system of competition over a distance less than 2 kilometers, skiers race in small groups of two to six in head-to-head format, with the winner advancing to the next round. Thanks to the faster pace, increased visibility for crowds and the elimination format, the sprint has been embraced by skiers and fans.

Event distances

● **Sprints:** Sprints are anywhere from 600 to 2,000 meters (or .6 to 2.0 kilometers). Sprints at Soldier Hollow for the World Cup and 2002 Olympics will be 1.5 kilometers.

● **Short distances:** Before the recent advent of the sprints, the shortest cross country races were usually 5 to 10 kilometers.

● **Middle distances:** These are the mid-range events — 20 to 30 kilometers for men and 15 to 20 for the women.

● **Long distances:** Usually in international and Olympic competition, the maximum distances for men are 50 kilometers and women 30 kilometers. Some Nordic marathons are competed in distances of up to 100 kilometers (60 miles).

Event starts

● **Interval:** Using the oldest form of cross country starts for individual distances, the skiers are allowed to begin in timed intervals — often 30 seconds apart. Winners then are based solely on their finish times in the event and not on the order of finish. Starting orders are determined by random selection.

● **Pursuit:** Skiers begin a second leg in order of their finish of the first leg, with intervals determined by the time they finished behind the first-place finisher.

● **Mass:** Long used as the starting method for relay events, mass starts join pursuit starts as recent alternatives in beginning individual events. Lined up in rows, all skiers start at once, with the crowd treated to a first-finisher-is-the-winner format.

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● **Women’s 30 kilometers:** Similar to the men’s 50K in type of event and technique used.

● **Men’s 4x10-kilometer relay:** Four men comprise a squad, with each skiing 10-kilometer legs. Rather than the staggered, time-interval starts for most individual races, the first skiers in relay competition begin in a mass start. Through 1988, the relay was a freestyle event; since the 1992 Albertville Games, two skiers must use the classical technique, while the other two employ the skating method.

● **WOMEN’S 4X5-KILOMETER RELAY:** Similar to the men’s relay in start, technique and number of team members. The four women, however, each ski five-kilometer segments.

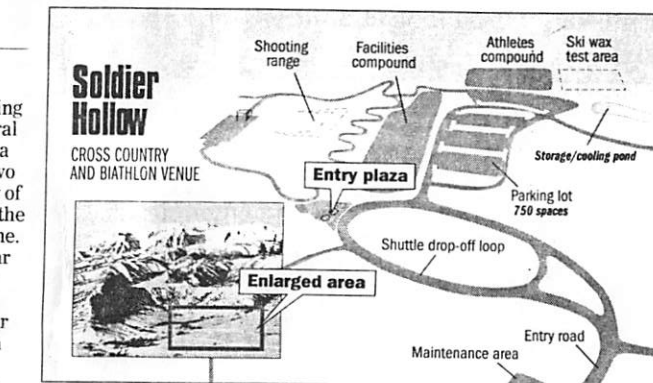
● **Men’s 20-kilometer combined pursuit:** The pursuit differs from other traditional individual events in several ways. First, it’s actually a two-race event; second, competitors place in the order they finish the event in head-to-head competition, rather than according to their time in interval-started races. Starting off in timed intervals, skiers will use the classical technique in a 10-

kilometer morning segment. In the afternoon-ending 10-kilometer race, the skiers start off in order and relative time of the morning race’s finish — the leader starts, followed the second-place finisher as many seconds after as the time margin that he was behind the leader in the earlier race. Able to use the freestyle technique in the second segment, all competitors depart in order and according to their relative team behind the first-race leader — hence, the “pursuit” name. The combined pursuit ends up being head-to-head competition, with the overall winner being the first to finish the afternoon race, the runner-up second and so forth. In past Olympics, the men’s 10K medal event — the finish order and individual times — served as the first segment of the combined

pursuit, which was held on a subsequent day. For the 2002 Salt Lake Games, the first segment of the pursuit will be a separate, nonmedal race scheduled in the morning prior to the final “pursuit” race in the afternoon of the same day.

● **WOMEN’S 10-KILOMETER PURSUIT:** Similar to the men’s race in procedure and technique. Women will ski two five-kilometer segments in the same day for the combined pursuit event.

● **MEN’S AND WOMEN’S 1.5-KILOMETER SPRINTS:** A new Olympic event added for the 2002 Salt Lake Games, the “sprint” is all that its name implies — a mad dash across a very short course. Skiers compete first in qualifying heats, with the top finishers advancing through subsequent quarterfinals, semifinals and finals competitions.



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